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MVA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF VISUAL ARTS

IN

PRINTMAKING

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

submitted by BEN KUI-HUNG WONG
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Visual Arts.

The University of Alberta

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I hereby release the following works for incorporation into the University Collections, University of Alberta, as part of the Master of Visual Arts Thesis Collection:

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>MEDIUM</u>	<u>SIZE</u>
"NEW BORN"	1993	Frottage: Colors and wax in hand- made paper	80 X 105 cm
"UNTITLED"	1993	Frottage: Colors in handmade paper	90 X 90 cm

BEN WONG

STEP ON SNOW
Prints & Paperworks

March 31 to April 18, 1993

Fine Arts Building Gallery
Edmonton, AB, Canada

Life wanders; we know not where we are,
as if a goose steps on snow or clay, occasionally, and,
foot prints remain, sometimes.
Does the goose care flying east or west?

By SU Shi (1037-1101), Chinese poet
from *Matching Zizyou, at Mian Pond, Thinking of the Past* .

Translated by Dr. F. S. Chia
Professor of Zoology
University of Alberta

Artist's Statement

Ben Wong

Edmonton, Alberta, March, 1993

About this statement

The following has been written after the completion of the work in this exhibition.

It is impossible to translate my creative experience into words. I can only understand by making. When at work, I am totally absorbed in the reality of the moment.

To me, the only possible value in writing this statement is that the visible can be a clue to the invisible; the verbal can be a clue to the non-verbal.

For the purpose of communication, I have sorted and re-arranged fragments of my memory.

This results in a totally subjective manipulation of fragments.

About this exhibition

Works in this exhibition are not arranged in chronological order. Information labels have not been placed beside each piece. The intention is to invite viewers to sense what the work of art is capable of saying without words.

I believe it is the responsibility of viewer to classify as part of their own search for order.

About limit

I use the wall as a real limit and a symbol of my limits.

I do not fight against the wall. My *freedom* cannot exist without it. Without the wall, I would be suspended in mid-air. This is not freedom.

In my work, I keep close to the wall. I touch it. I embrace it and I always want to go beyond it.

About process

Our daily experiences as city-dwellers are fragmented. I want to explore the possibility of creating a continuum in life in order to regain a sense of wholeness of being.

The mystery of creativity lies in between repetitive actions and active adjustments.

Take a piece of rubbing as an example. It is done by a repetitive stamping of waterbased ink on paper against a wall. Each act of stamping is *almost* the same.

But, if we look into each particular moment, the conditions for each stamping cannot be the same. Time has elapsed. Position has shifted. The paper is slowly drying out. Each act of stamping must grow out of a sensitive adaptation to the changing situation.

In my concept, the whole edition of prints exists in a single piece of original rubbing.

This kind of editioning is radically organic, but who said that editioning should always be mechanical?

About layers

Layer is a grid through which I look at an artwork.

A conventional print requires a supporting ground, which is often very dominant even in the finished work. The ground sets the limits to the work. It determines the size, the foreground, the background and the order of layering colors.

In this series of work, I attempt to remove the dominant role of the supporting ground. Every layer in my work has equal status. Layer is carrier of image. Each layer consists of an image and all the layers put together make up the work of art.

This technique produced surprising results. The size of the work was no longer determined by the supporting ground. The order of layering could be changed. In fact, the front and the back were no longer fixed. I

was able to use ink and color in different ways, sometimes behind a layer and sometimes between layers.

About the medium

The medium consists of hand-made oriental paper, flexible and inexpensive.

When this paper is moistened, it becomes extremely soft. It is flexible enough to adapt to the texture of the ground I have chosen. Once the paper has dried, it becomes rigid and strong again. The strength can be enhanced with variation in the layers and changes in texture.

The paper I use in my artwork reflects a number of techniques I have used, for example:

1. methods of combining oil-based and water-based printing,
2. methods of coloring paper without reducing its flexibility,
3. methods that increase or reduce the transparency or opacity of the paper, and
4. methods of laminating printed papers without the use of press.

Some of these techniques reflect Chinese traditions in wood-block, printing, rubbing and papermaking that are over one thousand years old.

I also used techniques and knowledge which come out of contemporary art practice, such as , color theory, scientific analysis of paper and research in paint chemistry.

My research has focused on developing original ways of working with the media I have chosen.

Efforts have been made to establish a harmony between techniques drawn from both Canadian and Chinese cultures.

I have adapted these means to the situation in which I find myself, and I want to account for the specific facilities available to me.

This is how I respond to my experience in the grand Canadian prairie.

From the Artist's Notebook

July 9, 1991

The real question is about making art rather than about completing a genre.

Sept 18, 1991

Even in editioning, what I expect is still the *blossom*, the unexpected charms that come up with each print.

Sept 18, 1991

At work, I always try to exist in a realm in which subject and object forget each other. When the relationship of subject and object disappears, the function of knowing in my mind is switched off. A pleasure of relaxation thus comes.

Oct 23, 1991

How to make a print but:

- not limited by the size of the block/plate,
- not limited by the size of the press bed,
- not limited by the size of the paper, and
- not limited by the size of the surface for drying.

Jan 8, 1992

It makes a difference if we can create a composition without having to draw the frame first.

Feb 10, 1992

The medium of an artwork is a physical presence. But most of the time this presence is so strong that it becomes an obstacle for the viewers' eyes to make contact with the spiritual content.

How to weaken this presence and to make the medium 'transparent' are the questions that often occupy my mind.

Sept 1, 1992

Imbutsu, "stamped Buddha," in reality has two historical meanings. On the one hand, it signifies a small Buddhist image printed on paper or cloth with a seal or stamp. On the other, it has a rather broader meaning, which is "an impression of a Buddhist image."

In this latter sense, it can be made not only on a piece of cloth or paper, but also in sand, in water, or in the smoke of an incense burner. It may, in effect, be an impression in the worshiper's mind rather than an image visible to others. Or, if it is made in sand, it may be a visible image that exists only temporarily.

There are *imbutsu*, then, on two levels, the material and the spiritual.

(Excerpt from Mosaku Ishida, *Japanese Buddhist Prints*, p.8.)

Dec 2, 1992

In the process of printmaking, we usually put stress on the physical matrix, a block or a plate. I always find another kind of matrix which should be called *software matrix*. This name is a combination of the terminology in information technology and printmaking.

Today, it is common sense that the printed images by dot-matrix printer and line plotter are mostly determined by the software and data in the processor.

Interestingly enough, the quality of traditional Chinese woodblock is determined by the sensibility and artistic insight of the printer rather than by a piece of block matrix.

Dec 12, 1992

Painting on the canvas is an involvement. It's a language, back and forth. That stroke on the canvas is a commitment. There the possibilities stop with *that* stroke and *that* color. But to pursue the stroke by printing it again and again and again - to see what its real possibilities are in various technical situations - that becomes something else. And prints then become something other than just multiple copies of a nice image. The printing *act* becomes very creative and very interesting. - Robert Motherwell.

(Excerpt from Stephanie Terenzio, ed., *The prints of Robert Motherwell*, p 78.)

Mar 19, 1993

When the first Ford automobiles came rolling off the assembly line - shiny, smooth, and above all, all the same, the world came to see uniformity - mass quantities of uniformity - as the mark of excellence for the modern age. Handmade seemed unbelievably crude in comparison.

Now the very reverse is coming to be true. Smooth, shiny, and uniform is often now equated with crude and cheap, especially when compared with the individuality of hand crafted (or somehow individually crafted) products.

(Excerpt from Faith Popcorn, *The Popcorn Report*, p. 44.)

BEN WONG

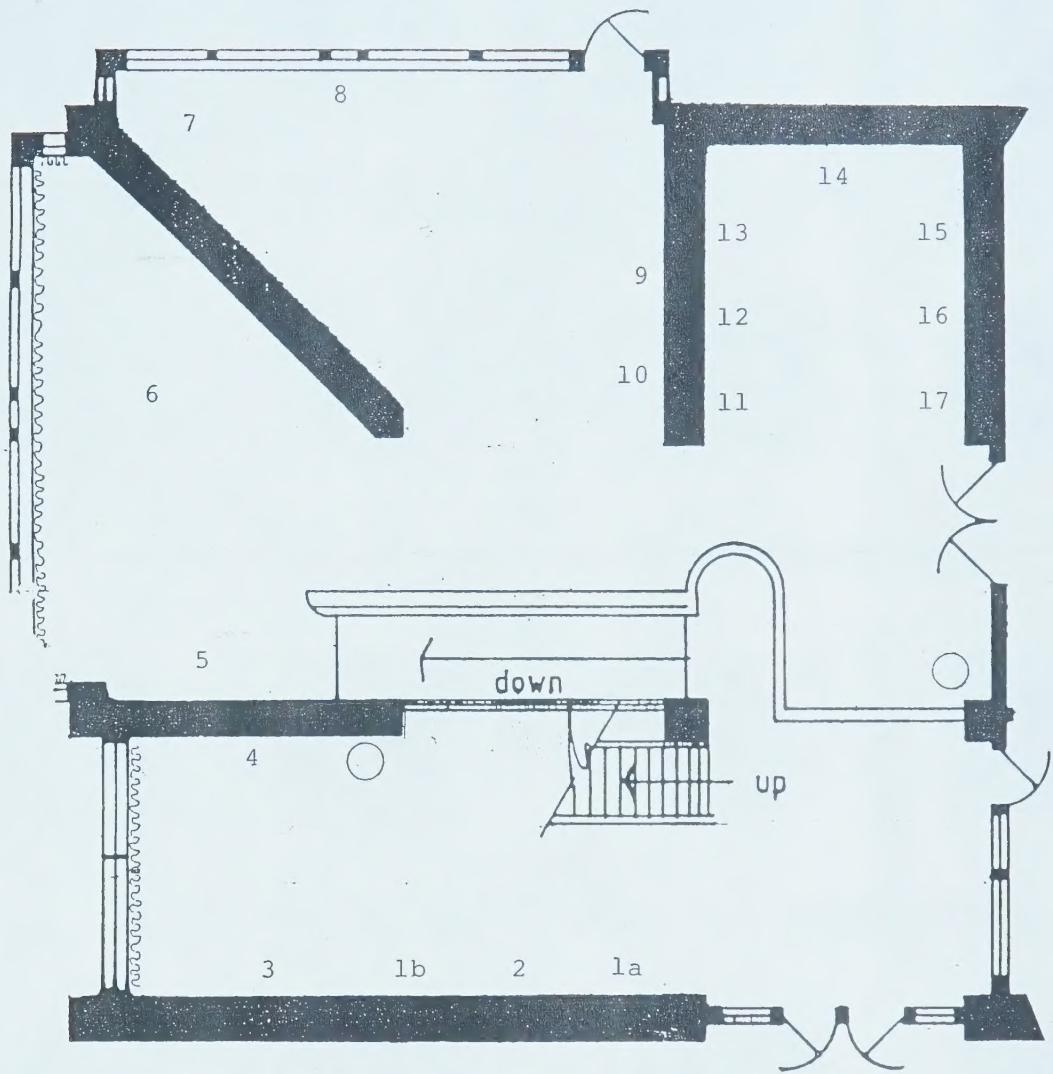
STEP ON SNOW
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List of Exhibits

1.	<i>What</i>	1991	Frottage: ink on and between laminated handmade paper
2.	<i>New Born</i>	1993	Frottage
3.	<i>Reading Rhythm</i>	1992	Frottage
4.	<i>Death Joke</i>	1993	Frottage
5.	<i>Seen & Unseen</i>	1993	Frottage
6.	<i>Endless Tracks</i>	1992	Frottage
7.	<i>To Be Continued</i>	1993	Frottage and mixed media
8.	<i>Walking Rhythm</i>	1992	Frottage
9.	<i>Swimming -Floating II</i>	1992	Etchng and stencil on laminated paper
10.	<i>Couple</i>	1991	Chine-collé etching and water-based woodblock
11.	<i>Untitled</i>	1993	Frottage
12.	<i>Unknown</i>	1993	Frottage
13.	<i>Internal Scenery #1</i>	1991	Frottage
14.	<i>Contacts</i>	1992	Frottage
15.	<i>Harmony</i>	1991	Frottage
16.	<i>Process-Process</i>	1992	Frottage
17.	<i>Joined Space</i>	1991	Frottage



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